

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00
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AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE
CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 3996

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PK, PINT
SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW

SUMMARY: IN PLAYING THE PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW CARD FROM
HIS DIMINSHING DECK, BHUTTO WAS PROBABLY MOVED PRIMARILY
BY THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN LAHORE. COINCIDENTALLY,
THE MOVE HAS AN HISTORIAL PRECEDENT THERE DATING BACK
TO 1953 COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES. BHUTTO IS ALSO LIKELY TO
HAVE REGARDED THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW AS A WAY
OF DEMONSTRATING TO THE PUBLIC AND THE OPPOSITION THAT
THE MILITARY REMAIN COMMITTED TO HIM AND WAS PREPARED TO
GO ONE FURTHER STEP IN MAINTAINING HIM IN POWER. THE
QUESTION WHICH THIS POINT RAISES -- ONE WE CANNOT ANSWER AT
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THIS TIME -- IS WHETHER THERE WERE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH
THE MILITARY AGREED TO PLAY THIS MORE ACTIVE AND, FOR IT,
POLITICALLY MORE DANGEROUS ROLE. PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW CAN
SUCCESSFULLY PROP UP BHUTTO FOR MORE THAN THE SHORTEST TERM
ONLY IF IT IS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHALLENGED, ESPECIALLY
IN THE PUNJAB.

WE ARE NOT YET AWARE OF ANY OFFICIAL PNA REACTION TO THE PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW MOVE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AFTER A BRIEF ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN THE THREE CITIES BY THE MILITARY, THE ALLIANCE WILL MOUNT A CHALLENGE TO ARMY CONTROL. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE PNA, OR ITS SUPPORTERS, ARE DIMINSHING THEIR EFFORT OUTSIDE THE MARTIAL LAW CITIES. WE STILL HAVE ONLY RUMORS AND CONJECTURES TO REPORT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. ALL THAT CAN SAFELY BE SAID IS THAT BHUTTO SEEMS READY TO DO ANYTHING TO REMAIN IN POWER. BUT HIS MOVES THROUGHOUT THE CRISIS HAVE PROVED TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE, AND EVEN AN OFFER ON HIS PARTY TO PLAY A RESTRICTED CARETAKER ROLE AS PM DURING A PROMPTLY SCHEDULED ELECTION CAMPAIGN MAY WELL PROVE A NON-STARTER. END SUMMARY

1. THE IMPOSITION OF PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW -- THE TURNING OVER TO THE ARMED FORCES OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER IN THE AREAS MOST SERIOUSLY DISTURBED IN THE PROLONGED POLITICAL UPHEAVAL -- HAD BEEN WIDELY DISCUSSED AS A POSSIBILITY BY POLITICALLY INVOLVED PAKISTANIS BEFORE IT WAS ACTUALLY ANNOUNCED LAST NIGHT. IT HAS A PRECEDENT IN THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW IN LAHORE DURING THE AHMEDIYA RIOTS OF 1953. ALTHOUGH DETAILS OF HOW THE NEW ARRANGEMENT WILL OPERATE ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE, WE PRESUME THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WILL PROVIDE GENERAL GUIDANCE TO THE MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITIES IN KARACHI, HYDERABAD, AND LAHORE VIA ARMY CONTROL HEADQUARTERS IN RAWALPINDI, WITH THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ARMY AUTHORITIES THEMSELVES IMPLEMENTING THIS ACCORDING TO CIRCUMSTANCES ON THE GROUND. THE SIND AND PUNJAB GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN RELIEVED OF ANY DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY FOR LAW AND ORDER UNDER THE ANNOUNCEMENT, THOUGH WE WOULD EXPECT THAT THE PROVINCIAL BUREAUCRACIES WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY.

2. IN PLAYING THIS NEW CARD FROM HIS DIMINISHING DECK, THE PRIME MINISTER WAS PROBABLY MOVED PRIMARILY BY THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN LAHORE. THIS CITY REMAINS AT THE FOCUS OF THE POLITICAL CONFRONTATION, AND GRAVE TROUBLE WAS EXPECTED THERE TODAY AS A RESULT OF THE PNA-CALLED HARTAL AND THE PROCESSIONS SCHEDULED TO ACCOMPANY IT. MANY REPORTS WE HAVE SEEN SUGGESTED THAT THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES COULD NO LONGER BE COUNTED ON TO CONTROL THE WORSENING SITUATION, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF THE EVIDENT DETERIORATION OF POLICE MORALE AND THE GROWING STREET CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN OPPOSING PARTISAN FORCES. BHUTTO ALMOST CERTAINLY CALCULATED THAT THE ONLY WAY TO AVOID A MAJOR CONFLAGRATION, PERHAPS INVOLVING

IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO HIS POLITICAL POSITION, WAS TO BRING IN THE MILITARY, NOT EARLIER EMPLOYED IN THE CITY IN A MAJOR WAY. BY CONTRAST, THE SITUATION IN KARACHI AND HYDERABAD WAS QUITE DIFFERENT. IN BOTH OF THOSE PLACES THE ARMY WAS ALREADY DEEPLY INVOLVED IN MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER AND IN KARACHI A CITYWIDE CURFEW HAD ALREADY BROUGHT THE URBAN AREA UNDER AT LEAST TEMPORARY CONTROL EARLIER IN THE DAY. AS CONGEN KARACHI SUGGESTS (KARACHI 1892), THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND THERE WILL NOT BE GREATLY CHANGED BY THE MARTIAL LAW ANNOUNCEMENT, THOUGH THE APPARENT ELIMINATION OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FROM THE CHAIN OF COMMAND WILL ALTER THE LEGAL POSITION AND ELIMINATE THE POSSIBILITY OF JURISDICTIONAL DISPUTES.

3. BHUTTO IS ALSO LIKELY TO HAVE REGARDED THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW AS A WAY OF DEMONSTRATING TO THE PUBLIC AND THE OPPOSITION THAT THE MILITARY REMAINED COMMITTED TO HIM
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AND WAS PREPARED TO GO ONE FURTHER STEP IN MAINTAINING HIM IN POWER. THE QUESTION WHICH THIS POINT RAISES -- ONE WE CANNOT AT THIS TIME ANSWER -- IS WHETHER THERE WERE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE MILITARY AGREED TO PLAY THIS MORE ACTIVE AND, FOR IT, POLITICALLY MORE DANGEROUS ROLE.

4. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE MILITARY AGREED TO UNDERTAKE MARTIAL LAW RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE THREE AREAS UNCONDITIONALLY. A SCENARIO CAN CERTAINLY BE IMAGINED, WITHOUT VIOLENCE TO OUR EARLIER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATTITUDES OF THOSE CONCERNED, IN WHICH THE PM CALLED IN THE MILITARY LEADERS, TOLD THEM THAT THE SITUATION IN THE CITIES WAS BEYOND THE ABILITY OF THE CIVIL AUTHORITIES TO CONTROL, AND CALLED ON THEM AS HE IS CONSTITUTIONALLY EMPOWERED TO DO TO TAKE OVER LAW AND ORDER RESPONSIBILITIES THERE. BHUTTO'S GAMBLE THAT THEY WOULD AGREE WOULD HAVE BEEN BASED ON AN AWARENESS THAT THE MILITARY REMAINED RELUCTANT TO MAKE ANY DECISIVE POLITICAL MOVE AT THIS STAGE. ACCEPTANCE OF PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW WOULD PUT OFF THE DAY OF RECKONING THE MILITARY HAVE SOUGHT TO AVOID.

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CINCPAC IMMEDIATE

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

5. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT BHUTTO ASSURED THE ARMY, WHETHER VAGUELY OR IN MORE CONCRETE TERMS, THAT THE PERIOD OF PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW WOULD BE A SHORT ONE WHICH WOULD SAVE THE CITIES FROM DISASTER WHILE HE WORKED OUT FURTHER CONCESSIONS DESIGNED TO BRING ABOUT A SETTLEMENT. IT IS POSSIBLE TO ADDUCE EVIDENCE, OR PURPORTED EVIDENCE, THAT HE MAY INDEED BE PREPARING TO MAKE SUCH ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS. HIS DECISION TO MEET THIS AFTERNOON WITH MEMBERS OF THE PPP PARLIAMENTARY PARTY; REPORTS, UNCONFIRMED, THAT JAILED OPPOSITION LEADERS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO A REST HOUSE NEAR PINDI FOR PARLEY WITH THE PM; AND THE POSSIBLE WILLINGNESS OF THE PNA TO SOFTEN ITS INSISTENCE ON THE PM'S RESIGNATION PRIOR TO FRESH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS (REPORTED IN LAHORE 414) HAVE SUGGESTED TO OBSERVERS THAT
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SOMETHING MAY BE IN THE WIND. IT HAS BEEN OUR WORKING ASSUMPTION THAT THE MILITARY WOULD WELCOME A SETTLEMENT WHICH BHUTTO AND THE PNA COULD AGREE TO, AND HAS BEEN EXERTING THEIR INFLUENCE TO BRING THIS ABOUT. IF BHUTTO COULD PERSUADE THEM THAT PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW WAS A HELPFUL MEASURE IN BRINGING ABOUT SUCH A SETTLEMENT, IT WOULD DIMINISH THE DISTASTE WHICH THEY MIGHT OTHERWISE FEEL ABOUT SUCH STEPPED UP INVOLVEMENT IN SHORING UP THE PM'S REGIME.

6. THE PNA. WE ARE NOT YET AWARE OF ANY OFFICIAL PNA

REACTION TO THE PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW MOVE. FOR THE MOMENT, AT LEAST, LAHORE AND KARACHI APPEAR TO BE CALM, THOUGH OUR INFORMATION IS STILL NECESSARILY SKETCHY BECAUSE OF CURFEW RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AFTER A BRIEF PERIOD OF ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN THE THREE CITIES BY THE MILITARY, THE PNA WILL MOUNT A CHALLENGE TO ARMY CONTROL. LAHORE, AGAIN, WOULD BE THE MOST CRUCIAL ARENA FOR THIS. THE EVENTS OF THE PAST WEEKS SUGGEST THAT THE PNA MIGHT WELL SEEK TO TEST MILITARY REACTIONS BY MOUNTING A PROCESSION OF UNARMED PUNJABI WOMEN IN DEFIANCE OF THE BAN ON DEMONSTRATIONS. SUCH MOVES WOULD BRING THE LARGELY PUNJABI ARMY FACE TO FACE WITH WHAT HAS LONG BEEN REGARDED AS THE ULTIMATE CONFRONTATION: THE REQUIREMENT TO SHOOT DOWN PUNJABI CIVILIANS TO KEEP BHUTTO IN POWER.

7. IN THE MEANTIME, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE PNA, OR ITS SUPPORTERS, ARE DIMINISHING THEIR EFFORTS OUTSIDE THE MARTIAL LAW CITIES. PINDI IS SHUT TIGHT, AND THERE ARE DISTURBING REPORTS FOR THE FIRST TIME OF SHOOTINGS IN PESHAWAR. (THESE ARE BEING REPORTED SEPARATELY AS RELAYED TO US BY THE CONSULATE THERE.) IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE COUNTRY MAY FACE "CREEPING MARTIAL LAW", IN WHICH THE MILITARY WILL BE ENTRUSTED WITH LAW AND ORDER RESPONSIBILITIES IN A GROWING LIST OF PAKISTANI CITIES. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE MILITARY WOULD BE PREPARED TO PLAY SUCH A ROLE FOR LONG UNLESS THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT

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SHOULD MOST UNEXPECTEDLY FADE AWAY. PARTIAL MARTIAL LAW CAN SUCCESSFULLY PROP UP BHUTTO FOR MORE THAN THE SHORTEST TERM ONLY IF IT IS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHALLENGED, ESPECIALLY IN THE PUNJAB.

8. AS FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, WE STILL HAVE ONLY RUMORS AND CONJECTURES. EVEN THE BASIS OF THESE CONJECTURES IS CHALLENGEABLE: AMERICAN CORRESPONDENTS RECENTLY ARRIVED HERE FROM LAHORE SERIOUSLY QUESTION AFTER MEETING THERE WEDNESDAY WITH A PNA SPOKESMAN THE REPORTED WILLINGNESS OF THE ALLIANCE TO SOFTEN ITS INSISTENCE THAT BHUTTO QUIT OFFICE. WHETHER BHUTTO, UNDER THE PRESSURE OF THE MILITARY AND OF A SECURITY SITUATION NO LONGER CONTROLLABLE BY CIVIL AUTHORITY, IS PREPARING TO GO A FURTHER BIG STEP AND AGREE TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS REMAINS EQUALLY UNCERTAIN AT THIS TIME. ALL THAT CAN BE SAFELY SAID IS THAT HE SEEMS READY TO DO ANYTHING TO HANG ONTO POWER. BUT HIS MOVES THROUGHOUT THE CRISIS HAVE BEEN TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE, AND EVEN AN OFFER ON HIS PART TO PLAY A RESTRICTED CARETAKER ROLE AS PM DURING A PROMPTLY SCHEDULED ELECTION CAMPAIGN MAY WELL PROVE A NON-STARTER WITH AN AROUSED AND DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OPPOSITION AND PUBLIC NOW OUT FOR HIS HEAD.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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